



## Testimony in Support: HB 6374, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct On College Campuses

Lily James, co-Executive Director, Every Voice Coalition

Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Lily James, I am a senior in college at Mount Holyoke College, born and raised in Wallingford Connecticut and a proud registered Connecticut voter. I also serve as co-Executive Director of the Every Voice Coalition, the student-led organization that has fought tirelessly on behalf of survivor and student rights in Connecticut to bring HB 6374 before you today. And today, I have the honor of testifying in favor of HB 6374, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct On College Campuses.

I'd like to begin today with some math: There are nearly 200,000 college students in the state of CT right now. With 1 in 10 college students experiencing sexual violence during their time in college, some **20,000 current college students have or will experience sexual violence during their time on campus**. To put that in perspective, the Hartford XL Center fits some 16,000 people. So please image with me for a second, the Hartford XL Center completely full PLUS another 4,000 people who've experienced this violence. And that 20,000 only accounts for current college students and does not take into account any of the previous generations of college students to come before us.

We have an epidemic on our hands. One whose rates have stayed stagnant since it was first documented in 1983. Yes, we've known how widespread and deeply horrific this epidemic is for nearly forty years. And each year, we've chosen not to address it which means millions of students unnecessarily experienced this violence. And you know what makes me devastatingly sad? **We know how to address it and we can prevent this every day and we choose not to.**

Students and survivors are coming before you today as they did last session, bearing their trauma and their fear for themselves and their loved ones, asking for help. **We need your help.**

**Help us collect data to figure out what is happening on our campuses.** We don't have any adequate, consistent or trustworthy mechanism to know what is happening in our homes and it is so scary. The campus climate survey component of HB 6374 is a best-practice way to collect this data so that all students know what is happening in their communities and administrations can know the best ways to prevent and address the issues in order to keep their students safe. We already know that we could fill the XL Center (and then some) with survivors right now, but those names and faces will also change every years as new students come to campus and experience the same devastating experiences as the survivors before them. That's why it's so critical that we administer this survey **biennially**, to give **all** students, including those who go to 2 year institutions or 4 year institutions, the opportunity to share their continually-evolving experiences.

**Help us fight the victim-blaming that survivors still face today** by instituting a common-sense amnesty policy. An amnesty policy is crucial to ensuring there is no barrier either to reporting or receiving supports or accommodations that a survivor may need post-incident.

**Connecticut has the opportunity to join just a handful of other states as leaders not only in our standard for higher education but in setting the standard for addressing this epidemic, that again, we have the power to prevent. Help us keep our peers and loved ones safe.**

Thank you for your time and your support of Connecticut survivors and students! Members of the Higher Educational Committee, please vote this bill out of committee as soon as possible. **Our students can't wait.**